

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 30 AUGUST
2016

REPORT BY COUNCILLOR ERIC BUCKMASTER, EXECUTIVE
MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

PROPOSAL TO SET UP A COUNTY WIDE HOME IMPROVEMENT
AGENCY SERVICE IN HERTFORDSHIRE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report sets out a proposal to establish a county-wide Home Improvement Agency, HIA, to help elderly and vulnerable persons to remain living independently at home. The initial focus would be the provision of statutory Disabled Facilities Grants, DFGs. In time, the HIA could provide handyperson schemes and promote measures to tackle fuel poverty and the like.
- East Herts Council has been working with other Hertfordshire districts and the County Council on a business case for a shared service with the aim of providing a consistent, high quality service that has the potential for financial efficiencies.
- All participating authorities are now being asked to confirm their commitment to participate in a shared service to enable detailed implementation plans to be devised with a view to the service 'going live' in 2017/18.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY:

That:

(A)	the proposal that East Herts Council becomes a partner in the Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency be supported;
(B)	the Council's revenue and capital budgets earmarked for processing and paying for Disabled Facilities Grants for 2017/18 onwards, fund East Herts' contributions to the shared Home Improvement Service be supported;

(C)	the Executive be asked to authorise the Head of Housing and Health, acting in consultation with the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing, to contribute to and agree the detailed arrangements to establish the HIA; and
(D)	The Executive authorise the Head of Housing and Health acting in consultation with the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing, to amend the Council’s Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy to accommodate the new arrangements.

1.0 Background

The legislative basis for Disabled Facilities Grants

1.1 The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 requires Local Housing Authorities (LHAs), including East Herts Council, to provide financial assistance with adaptations to the homes of disabled people, save those living in council housing whose works are funded through those councils’ overall rental income stream. The financial assistance to an individual takes the form of a means-tested Disabled Facilities Grant for adult disabled people and a non-means tested DFG for disabled children.

1.2 The grant administration process has remained largely unchanged for some years, namely:

- East Herts Council promotes DFGs locally
- when someone in East Herts applies for assistance, the County Council’s Occupational Therapy service carries out an assessment and makes recommendations about the necessary and appropriate adaptations
- East Herts Council receives the referral, assesses whether the works are reasonable and practicable, undertakes a means test to determine whether the client is required to make a contribution to the cost of works, and oversees the undertaking of the works.

Adaptation services for disabled people in Hertfordshire

1.3 LHAs receive a capital grant from central Government to support the requirement to give grants. Unlike in previous years, there is now no requirement to provide any match-funding locally. That said, East Herts, just as do all districts in Hertfordshire, supplements the national grant monies..

- 1.4 Since 2013, central Government's capital grant has been paid to Social Services authorities through the Better Care Fund. So, locally, Hertfordshire County Council receives the resources and passes them onto the districts. In 2016/17, the national DFGs allocations were increased markedly, with East Herts receiving £530,136, an uplift of £237,009 between 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- 1.5 In addition to DFGs, disabled people can benefit from Hertfordshire County Council's Equipment Service which provides minor adaptations such as grab rails, ramps and the like free of charge for recipients. It is understood that there is increased pressure on this budget due to the County Council's wider preventative duties under the Care Act 2014.
- 1.6 There are a number of handyperson services operating in Hertfordshire that undertake very minor works, such as repairing dripping taps. There are generally modest charges for these services. There is currently only a limited service in East Herts covering smoke alarm installation, security measures and the like.

The need to review services

- 1.7 There are a number of significant drivers for a fundamental reform of home adaptations services in Hertfordshire, principally:
 - East Herts has an ageing population, with increasing numbers wishing to remain living independently in their own homes
 - many LHAs lack the scale to provide DFGs services consistently
 - two-tier working arrangements are inherently confusing and can introduce inconsistency, delays and inefficiency
 - there is a track record in Hertfordshire of developing consistent, sustainable services for older and disabled people, such as Hertfordshire Community Meals, and Hertfordshire Careline, on which the HIA proposals can build
 - there is growing evidence that DFGs and related intervention can reduce hospital admissions, hasten patient discharge and delay moves to expensive residential care
 - older and disabled people's support needs are multi-faceted and not necessarily solely reliant on financial support –guidance and being able to access trusted traders can be helpful.

The benefits of a proposed shared service HIA

1.8 Bringing both tiers together and pooling staffing in a shared service HIA has a number of significant benefits, including:

- the processing of applications can become more streamlined. Of note, in recent years the number of Occupational Therapist referrals for DFGs in East Herts has fallen below expected trends. The reasons for this are unclear, but closer working and communication should help ensure residents receive timely and appropriate advice and assistance
- a combined service would be more resilient to staffing absences and turnover
- a county-wide integrated service is an investment opportunity for the Clinical Commissioning Groups operating in Hertfordshire. The current arrangement of 11 providers with different service standards is arguably less likely to attract such investment.

1.10 East Herts Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee considered an update report on the DFG programme on 16th February 2016. This included the background to the County-wide project. The Committee supported the principle of the proposed approach.

2.0 The Proposal for a Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency

2.1 Given the context described above, the Hertfordshire districts have together with the County Council reviewed the current delivery of services across all authorities, considered examples of alternative delivery models in other parts of the country and assessed the future needs of residents across the County.

2.2 The outcome is this proposal for a shared Home Improvement Agency, HIA. The vision for the shared HIA is to:

- establish a cost effective service that will not only deliver statutory services such as DFGs but will also be able to provide a service to those who fall outside of the grant eligibility
- promote independent living more generally by offering residents housing related services, such as housing advice, a handyman service, and home improvements.

2.4 The objectives of the shared HIA would be to:

- ensure all individuals in Hertfordshire who need housing adaptations can access a timely, accessible, equitable and fit for purpose service
- reduce health inequalities across the county
- deliver a fully standardised and streamlined service, enhancing operational efficiency, customer satisfaction and improving value for money
- implement robust monitoring arrangements against key performance indicators
- improve service resilience
- support the wider health and social care integration programme across Hertfordshire.

Outline operating model

2.5 The proposed operating model is as follows:

- a shared service model, not an outsourced service, hosted by the County Council
- Occupational Therapists drawn from the County Council's Occupational Therapy Service
- technical staff drawn from the district and borough councils choosing to join the shared service
- case officers would act as a single point of contact for the client with other professionals such as the Occupational Therapists and technical staff drawn in as required, thus reducing multiple handoffs between authorities. Of note, having Occupational Therapists and technical staff in the same team will significantly shorten the process of commissioning adaptation works compared with the current arrangements.

2.6 It is intended to deliver efficiencies in the costs of works by procuring a contractor framework for common adaptation works such as stair lifts and level access showers. This should also simplify the ordering of works.

2.7 The business case demonstrates that the service can be delivered across the county in a revenue neutral way – see **Essential Reference Paper 'B'** for the full business case.

2.8 The Business Case assumes that the Council maintains its capital

contribution for provision of disabled facilities grants to residents in the district at current or similar levels.

- 2.9 It is also believed that the proposed service has the potential to generate income by offering other housing services, for example to people wanting adaptations who do not qualify for a disabled facilities grant, in return for a fee.
- 2.10 The exact arrangements for the new service will depend on the number of authorities deciding to join the service. It is hoped that at least half of the ten districts along with the County Council will join at the outset. The intention is to launch the service in 2017/18.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Human Resources

- 3.2 As the Home Improvement Agency proposals include the provision of services currently carried out by East Herts Council staff, TUPE rules may apply. The extent to which TUPE applies, and to which staff if any, will be fully explored as part of the work to produce a full, final business case during the remainder of 2016/17.
- 3.3 At this stage, it is considered that there may be TUPE and re-location implications for at least one member of staff. There are also possibly additional staff whose workload includes some functions that would be transferred to the HIA, albeit to a smaller extent.
- 3.4 The staff potentially affected have been kept abreast of work to date on the HIA proposals, as have HR officers. Full consultation and engagement with staff would be completed as part of preparation of the full business case.

Finance

- 3.5 The Council's Finance team has worked closely with colleagues in the other participating districts and the County Council to pull together and scrutinise the financial case for the shared HIA.
- 3.6 The overall business case is predicated on the East Herts using current revenue and capital resources allocated for the processing and payment of DFGs as the Council's contribution to the HIA. It

is recognised, however, that as functions are transferred, there is likely to be a small level of residual costs remaining with the Council. This has been allowed for in the outline business case – see **Essential Reference Paper ‘B’** – which shows that overall, the proposals are cost neutral to the Council.

- 3.7 It will be important to review both the revenue and capital contributions to the HIA on a regular basis to ensure best value for East Herts is being maximised.

Background Papers

Review of DFG Services in Hertfordshire. Nov 2014

Supporting Independent Living Options Paper. Report to Chief Executives Co-ordinating Group. Jan 2016

Contact Member: Eric Buckmaster – Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing
Eric.buckmaster@eastherts.gov.uk

Contact Officer: Jonathan Geall – Head of Housing and Health
Contact Tel No extn 1594
jonathan.geall@eastherts.gov.uk

Report Author: Sheila Winterburn – Environmental Health Manager
- Residential
Sheila.winterburn@eastherts.gov.uk